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Team of specialists on sustainable fisheries

Report of the first Meeting of the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries

I. Introduction and attendance

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Team of Specialists (ToS) on Sustainable Fisheries held its first session on 29-30 January 2018. The session was attended by 80 delegates and experts representing national government agencies, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. The following UNECE member states were represented: Georgia, Greece, Monaco, Norway, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. The following Non-UNECE member states participated in the meeting: Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, Djibouti, Guatemala, Indonesia, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Peru, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uganda, and Viet Nam. The following United Nations (UN) Bodies and Organs participated in the meeting: the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the European Commission, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and private sector participated: the Centre for Socio-Economic Development (CSEND), CUTS International (Consumer Unity & Trust Society), FOCUS, Genoa Aquarium Foundation (FADG), International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), International Polar Foundation (IPF), Marine Stewardship Council, Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), South Centre, The Pew Trusts, World Wildlife Federation (WWF), the Federation of the Ukrainian Fish Industry Workers, and Conepe.

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II. Opening

2. The UNECE Executive Secretary opened the meeting by welcoming the establishment of UNECE Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries and stressed its importance in supporting countries' efforts to achieve of Sustainable Development Goal 14 that commits humanity to conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources. She mentioned that to help address growing concerns about the grave problem of overfishing by today's modern fishing fleets, UNECE with its United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and e-Business (UN/CEFACT) has come up with a concrete solution: a global standard, which helps improve fisheries information management, and plays a key role in preventing overfishing and the collapse of global fish stocks. With this standard, Fishery Management Organizations around the world have, for the first time, a communication tool to automate the collection and dissemination of the fishery catch data needed for sustainable fishery management and for detecting and combatting IUU fishing. In addition, the development of a reliable, up-to-date database on fish catches will improve research in science-based fishery management. The standard, which is a UN global standard, was adopted in 2016 and has already come under the spotlight for its high acceptance rate among fishermen and traders. It is currently being used in all European Union (EU) member states and other countries across the globe.

3. The Minister Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the WTO also welcomed the creation of the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries and stressed the relevance of its work in the follow-up to the WTO 11th Ministerial Conference, which discussed approaches to subsidies provided to unsustainable fisheries. She emphasized the importance of such matters to The Netherlands, which they have demonstrated by supporting the ToS. The Representative added that its goals can be only be achieved by working together, and engaging all key stakeholders for sustainable fishery management.

4. The UN/CEFACT Domain Coordinator for the Agriculture, Agri-food and Fishery Domain recounted the UN/CEFACT Fisheries Language for Universal eXchange (FLUX) standard development process, whose objective is to promote and improve information exchange, develop and manage data and support scientific research on fishery. The project started as a small group initiative of EU member states and later developed into a UN/CEFACT project which engaged experts from all regions of the world, and made it a global standard. He highlighted the need to do more work to maintain, further develop and implement the standard and to assist all interested countries and relevant partners with its implementation (which is the purpose of the ToS). As an example of work to be done on the standard, he mentioned the need to address the issue of liability concerns for data use and sharing.

III. Adoption of the Agenda (Agenda Item 1)

5. The Agenda of the meeting was approved as proposed (*Decision 1*)

IV. Election of officers (Agenda Item 2)

6. Frans Van Diepen from The Netherlands was elected as chair of the ToS.

7. The Secretariat invited delegations to submit expression of interest for the roles of two Vice-Chairs, possibly by 12 February 2018 (*Decision 2*)

V. Introduction of experts (Agenda Item 3)

8. A *tour de table* was conducted for experts to introduce themselves. The main expectations of the participants were to learn more about the ToS and the UN/CEFACT FLUX standard; to get an understanding of the policy, regulatory, financial and technical requirements to use and implement it; and to understand its relationship to fisheries subsidies and IUU fishing.

VI. Reports from partner organizations (Agenda Item 4)

9. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development representative outlined his organization's work in support of SDG 14, particularly in relation to the implementation of targets 14.4 and 14.6, with a focus on strengthening capacity building and technical assistance for small–scale and artisanal fisheries. He summarized the outcomes of the 2017 UN OCEAN Conference. He regretted that the output of the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference did not include a binding agreement on fisheries subsidies, and suggested possible alternative scenarios. The focus of the UN OCEAN Conference in July 2018 will be on the role of trade in seafood value chains.

10. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported on its relevant work areas and pointed out its activities in: 1. the fight against IUU, in particular through the Global Record—a tool to increase transparency, and a single access point for information about vessels and activities related to users; 2. responsible supply chains and trade through traceability of fishery products in the areas of food safety (Codex), fisheries eco-labelling, and certification; 3. policymaking through trends monitoring, including the production of global fishery statistics and information, and the role of the Coordinating Working Party on Fishery Statistics (CWP) in setting fishery statistical standards. Since 2013, the FAO and UN/CEFACT have been working together, particularly in relation to vessels identification, history, licences and inspection, and they expressed their readiness to engage with the ToS in its future work.

11. The representative from the World Trade Organization mentioned that fish is the most traded food commodity worldwide. Developing countries do half of this trade, with the most recent growth coming mainly from aquaculture. He is also referred to the supporting legal framework for sustainable fisheries management and highlighted recent discussions in the WTO's Committee on Trade and Environment on policy tools to combat IUU fishing, including catch certification schemes and traceability requirements. On the question of fisheries subsidies, he said that the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires had set a target of 2019 for completion of the negotiations. He emphasized the importance of increased transparency among WTO member states on IUU fishing, of non-discrimination and harmonization, paired with capacity building and technical assistance for developing countries, and referred to the importance of the work of the ToS in this area.

12. The United Nations Environment Programme presented the UNEP trade hub's three perspectives on trade: legal, biodiversity and economy. The trade hub advises countries on how to use trade to advance green economy, which contributes towards SDGs 14.4 and 14.6. Their work relates to fisheries subsidies through research on the impact of subsidies, the impact on resources of overfishing, and country level studies. Regarding UN/CEFACT FLUX, the importance of relating this standard to subsidies negotiations, the improvement of data collection for determining illegal fishing, the reduction of unreported activities, and the facilitation of the elimination of IUU fishing subsidies was emphasized.

13. Several countries' representatives discussed the technical and political issues of subsidies to IUU fishing (Bangladesh, Serbia). To move the negotiations forward, there is a primary need to agree on a common (minimum level) legal text in order to go beyond the trade perspective and into technical details—and in only 2 years. The specifications for sustainable trade and sustainable fisheries cannot be defined without a mandate based on a first draft legal text. However, technical specifications are required to have an insight into the problem of IUU fishing. There is no reliable global list of vessels involved in IUU fishing. There is also no reliable infrastructure to share information about stocks, vessel certification and fishing licences. Every country (coastal and in-land) has responsibilities for inspections and control of their fish catch and products. Due to the lack of national registrations and international exchange of data, the ability to combat IUU fishing is weak.

14. The International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development reported on its focus on how agreements can be designed to help sustainable development. This includes analysis, dialogue, research and capacity building. Its efforts on trade and IUU fishing include multilateral efforts (FAO, CITES, PSMA, CDS guidelines) and regional and unilateral measures to address IUU fishing. Unilateral certification systems, such as those created by the United States and the EU, create compliance difficulties for small-scale fisheries due to the proliferation of certification requirements. FLUX could be relevant in several ways: to monitor the vessels by flag states as well as their subsidies, and to help coastal states communicate reliable information with other WTO member states.

15. The European Commission DG MARE representative asserted that the EU has exclusive competence under the EU Common Fisheries Policy on FLUX implementation in the EU, as its 23 member states involved in fisheries are legally mandated to use it in the same way. Regarding the information architecture, any existing IT system can use FLUX standards. Vessels communicate with their flag state authority, which is further connected to other relevant authorities via the Central Node. Also, the Central Node can exchange data with other bodies, ports, and governments. The FLUX standards currently in place in the EU are vessel position and aggregated catches. Planning is underway to use FLUX to exchange vessel data, fishing activities, sales notes, licences and inspections. He emphasized the need for implementation documents, open source tools, and code list management. These free software tools will be shared with any interested party via FOCUS community. The EU also announced its willingness to make a voluntary contribution of 100,000 EUR to support the ToS work.

16. Some participants mentioned the need to provide implementation guidance and tools for countries, and the importance of getting support for electronic monitoring through FLUX. The interfacing between the national registration systems and the FLUX information exchange structure was also mentioned as an issue to be addressed by the ToS.

VII. Country Experiences (Agenda Item 5)

17. The Minister Plenipotentiary from **Romania** informed the meeting of the country's commitment to implement the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development. To this end, their national legislation is being adapted to regulate the use of aquatic resources. Furthermore, a special department of sustainable development has been created under the Prime Minister's office. She also presented Romania's collaboration initiatives, one of which being joint inspections with Bulgaria to combat IUU. Romania submitted voluntary commitments to SDG 14 at the UN OCEAN Conference and other meetings which relate to climate change and sustainable fisheries through decent job creation and inclusiveness.

18. The representative from the Brazilian Ministry of Environment presented the Fisheries Document of Origin D.O.P. project, which is a system for monitoring and

tracking fisheries production and trade. Based on an existing project for timber products, the project is more complex as a greater diversity of products and actors are involved. The representative highlighted that such a monitoring tool is important, as small-scale fisheries are responsible for nearly 40% of Brazilian production. An import component will also be implemented at a later stage.

19. The Secretary of the UNECE Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies presented two pilot projects in support of sustainable fishery management, implemented in Uganda and Namibia, to highlight the need of implementing a transparent environment. She emphasized the importance of risk management, which is where FLUX is particularly helpful, as it helps in identifying the source of risk. The discussion following this intervention stressed the importance of risk analysis and the impact of non-compliance as core elements of work for the ToS.

VIII. Vision and Mission Statements (Agenda Item 6)

20. The draft vision and mission statements, summarizing the overall goals and methods by which to achieve them were discussed, amended and approved (*Decision 3*).

IX. Adoption of the Programme of Work of the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries (Agenda Item 7)

21. The draft Programme of Work detailing the scope, objectives, activities, work areas, guiding principles, governance, and funding for the ToS was discussed, amended and approved (Decision 4).

X. Future work (Agenda Item 8)

22. Delegates and participants were invited to inform the Secretariat of their interest to join the Team of Specialists by written communication, by 12 February 2018.

XI. Other business (Agenda Item 9)

23. Delegates and participants were invited to attend a working meeting of the ToS during the thirty-first UN/CEFACT Forum on 23 to 27 April 2018.

XII. Adoption of decisions and the report of the first session (Agenda Item 10)

24. Delegates and participants were invited to adopt the report of the session (*Decision 5*)